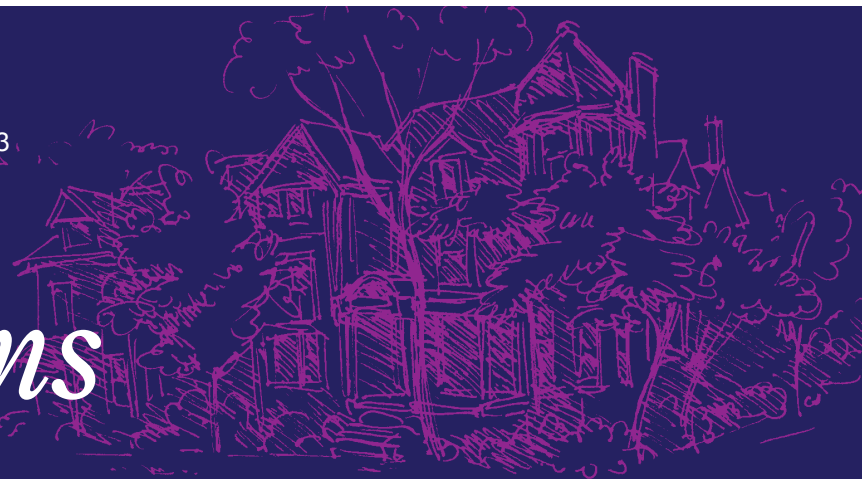


The Fair Havens



Included in this issue:

- Seniors and Loneliness
- Encouraging Elders' Spiritual Growth
- Seniors' Contribution to Ecclesial Life
- Terms of Reference

Adapting to our Changing Demographics

Under the Law of Moses, the children of Israel were to esteem and respect the aged. "You shall rise up before the greyheaded, and honour the aged, and you shall revere your God; I am the LORD" (Leviticus 19:32). This becomes an increasingly relevant command, as the numbers of older brothers and sisters increase.

In the next 20 years almost one third of the Canadian population will move into what's termed 'the senior stage of life' and this demographic trend will be reflected in our ecclesial composition. Consequently, the influence, contribution and needs of these senior members will become an increasingly significant part of our ecclesial life as we await Christ's return.

How well we succeed in integrating senior brothers and sisters into ecclesial life will be reflected in our ecclesia's spiritual health. It is unrealistic to think that if seniors' needs go unmet, or opportunities for involvement are not realized, that ecclesial life will not be adversely affected. Similarly, seniors and soon-to-be seniors need to be cognizant of the important role they will play in maintaining a spiritually vibrant ecclesia as they become the predominant demographic. As abilities and needs change, older brothers and sisters should be receptive to seeing their contribution through the lens of the aging process. Similarly, the ecclesia must remain flexible and adaptive to the requirements of an older membership.

It is important to value the ongoing participation of older members of the ecclesia. Senior brothers and sisters should not contemplate 'retiring' from ecclesial responsibilities. We may have heard the refrain, 'We've made our contribution, now it's their turn'. Certainly as seniors age, they may not be able to carry on as before, but that is not to say that their contribution should cease. The ecclesia is going



to continue to need the gifts and active involvement of its more senior members—although these contributions will need to be tempered by changing circumstance and ability.

We live in a self-centered age where satisfying ‘wants’ can take center stage. We need to be conscious that this mind set doesn’t spill over into our life in Christ. Rather than being preoccupied with ‘What can the ecclesia do for me?’ and seeking only benefits and entitlements for oneself, brethren of Christ, irrespective of age, should see themselves first as servants—as gifted, positive contributors to ecclesial life. Certainly the ecclesia should and will pay attention to the special pastoral needs of its more aged members, but this must become a reciprocal arrangement with senior members similarly sharing their wisdom and counsel learned from a life of discipleship.

Another area where seniors will play an increasing role is with respect to ecclesial finances. The financial health of the ecclesia will increasingly depend on the generosity of senior brothers and sisters. This responsibility to support, as each is able, the programs and expenses of an ecclesia is not something that can be downloaded to a younger generation who are both fewer in number and often overwhelmed with the obligations of a young family. However, not all seniors have the same financial resources to be able to pitch in. We read in Acts 11:29, ‘The disciples, *each according to their ability*, decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea.’

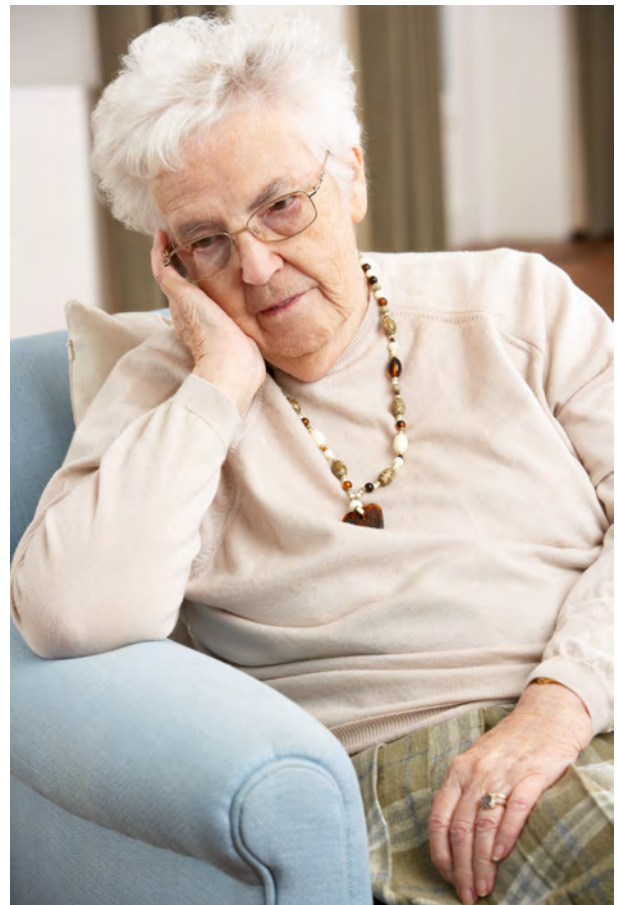
Seniors and Loneliness

The observation has been made that while we may have succeeded in adding years to this life, we have not been so successful in adding life to the years. While many older brothers and sisters remain connected and actively involved with family and the ecclesia, others have become increasingly isolated. Loneliness is something that we try to avoid while solitude can be enjoyable and fulfilling. It is a sad irony that in an age where people are more connected than ever through social networking and communication technology, so many older individuals feel socially adrift.

And while loneliness is different from being alone, many seniors – perhaps already isolated through bereavement, disability or geographic location – can find their solitary lives to be particularly difficult. Those who have busy lives might not fully appreciate that elders’ lives occupy a totally different landscape. Loneliness is a state of mind, characterized by feelings of sadness, desolation or even despair. By nature we are social creatures, and a daily routine lived in unwanted isolation makes for an unhealthy lifestyle and can lead to depression and mental illness. In one study of the correlation between social relationships and mortality, loneliness was as strong a predictor of early death as was alcoholism or smoking, and it was a stronger

Generally, senior brothers and sisters are more comfortable with the status quo, and are often reluctant to embrace change. However, the needs of the entire body must be taken into consideration. This requires an inter-generational ‘accommodation’ of the needs of each demographic within the ecclesia in order to maintain harmony. Increasingly, initiatives and energy to assure this harmony will have to come from the senior members. Unless they are proactive, this senior segment of the meeting might be perceived as resistant to valuing the views of the young.

Studies have demonstrated that senior church members who have grandchildren have a more positive attitude towards the participation of younger generations in church life. However, many senior brothers and sisters may not have grandchildren, or if they do, these grandchildren may not attend their grandparents’ ecclesia. To foster strong inter-generational connections, elder members need to embrace the children of other families and shower them with the same patience and love that they would if they were their own grandchildren. It is bonds such as these that forge strong inter-generational ties that benefit both the giver as well as the recipient.



predictor than obesity and a sedentary lifestyle. Indeed, God declared that it was not good for man to be alone and He created Eve (Genesis 2:18). Loneliness can exert a debilitating effect on the body, mind and spirit. David experienced this while fleeing the jealousy of Saul, 'Turn to me and be gracious to me for I am lonely and afflicted' (Psalm 25:16).

Some seniors are lonely because they have been bereaved, or perhaps they have few family and friends left alive, or they may be more introverted and find it difficult to make new friends. Some miss their children who now have lives of their own and may live some distance away. Others find it difficult to adjust to retirement and the loss of interaction with work colleagues.

Yet, 'the LORD is close to the broken hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit' (Psalm 34:18). Similarly, Jesus encouraged his followers, 'Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest' (Matthew 11:28) As Christ's brethren, we too can be a solace to aged believers. Making time for seniors, and simply listening empathetically can make a significant difference. This is an activity of which we are all capable. When people feel alone, being listened to can mean a lot.

Some of the roots of loneliness have been linked to the erosion of local communities and community institutions. The local shops, the bank, the corner store and post office were once an important part of the fabric of society contributing to both its social wellbeing and commercial stability. This sense of community has given way to big box stores and urban sprawl. Allied to this, there appears to be a general decline in neighbourliness particularly in larger centres.

Technology, which can be such a benefit for us, can also be a huge hurdle to overcome. As more services migrate online, those without online skills become increasingly isolated, and although this is not a problem exclusive to older people, it is more prevalent among this group.

Is loneliness in old age inevitable? There are many new doors awaiting exploration that were otherwise closed in the past, and there are many ways to combat loneliness. These can include participation in educational programs, volunteering, taking up a new hobby, or learning a new skill.

However, for some people, combating loneliness it is not a simply a matter of going out and joining a club. If they could, they would. Often what has caused the withdrawal

from interaction with others has deeper roots including fear, shyness, introversion, and lack of confidence. Addressing these underlying causes is the first step to breaking the barriers down.

One avenue in the struggle against loneliness is to remember that we all have a friend in Jesus (John 15:15). In our Sunday School hymn, we are reminded that 'in his arms he'll take and shield us, and we will find a solace there'.



Our relationship with our Heavenly Father and His Son can transcend feelings of loneliness or isolation if we are aware of their involvement in our lives. Even if seniors may feel ignored or marginalized in their community, we all have the abiding promise that our Heavenly Father will never leave nor forsake us.

The Apostle Paul, now an old man and imprisoned in Rome wrote to his friend Philemon (1:7) 'Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the saints.' Paul gained

strength from the memories of his relationships with his fellow workers in the faith. Healthy relationships remain critical to everyone's well being.

As brothers and sisters in Christ, we can play a significant role in combating the loneliness of aged members in our ecclesia. We have weekly opportunities to connect with those who may be by themselves at meeting. If they are housebound and living alone, consider taking time to phone or visit. A regular half-hour visit could make a difference in helping someone feel wanted and remembered. Elderly brothers and sisters living alone may often require assistance with tasks around the home or perhaps they may just enjoy a friendly chat. A life with frequent interaction with others has the potential to be a life rich in connection, engagement and belonging. If someone asked if you would want to be alone when you get older, the answer

would probably be, 'No'. Something as simple as going to the store or mall, even if just to window shop can provide social stimulation to a housebound senior. Outings may require some accommodation to a senior's changing needs and circumstances. An ecclesial barbeque may not be the best venue for a senior who is bothered by the loudness of energetic children, or who has a delicate digestive system, or who may have trouble navigating uneven ground with a cane. A shared meal in a quiet restaurant may prove to be a more enjoyable outing.

Most of us fear being alone, and the entire ecclesia—brothers, sisters, young people and children all have the opportunity to prevent the fears of older members becoming a reality. A cohesive, inclusive, inter-generationally connected ecclesia is good for us all.

Encouraging Elders' Spiritual Growth

Although physical impediments associated with aging may limit an elder's sphere of activity, one area that provides room for continuing growth is the spiritual domain. The body may become increasingly debilitated, but the mind and heart are still capable of growth and renewal. There are no age restrictions when it comes to growing towards spiritual maturity. The spiritually mature person can continue to develop the fruits of the spirit-- love, joy, peace and all the other spiritual fruits. In spite of changes, losses, and chronic health conditions, elderly believers can continue to cultivate their relationship with God.

Too often, however, our elderly may encounter obstacles to their spiritual growth. Some may be too feeble to get to meeting or to participate in religious activities with other believers. As their friends die or move away, some may lose their connections to the ecclesia. Others may feel alienated if they perceive that they are ignored and the ecclesia's focus is on the younger generation. Failing eyesight can make it hard to read the Bible, and loss of hearing can make it difficult to understand exhortations. Regrettably, some elders may be affected by negative stereotypes and myths that project old people as unteachable, useless, unproductive or dependent on others. Like all of Christ's brethren, our seniors need the fellowship and encouragement of other believers. Faith that is not nourished stagnates. What can be done to foster an elder's faith? As ecclesial members or caregivers, we have a special opportunity to

demonstrate the love of God to our elders. Our sensitivity to our aging loved ones' spiritual needs can give comfort and stability in a time of change and uncertainty. Looking up to our elders spiritually is not only very affirming to them, but also honours God (Lev.19:32). Despite the obstacles, spiritual growth is both possible and desirable for the continued well being of elderly believers.

Although growing old often involves illness and loss, it can also be a time for reflection. One benefit of such introspection is to draw meaning and purpose out of one's life. For some, the experience of life and aging can produce

Like all of Christ's brethren, our seniors need the fellowship and encouragement of other believers. Faith that is not nourished stagnates.

negative attitudes such as bitterness, self-centeredness and despair. Others are able to find significance in the past, purpose in the present and hope for the future. Irrespective of our age, we doubtless all would confess, that we are not yet the spiritual man or woman we would like to be, but we thank our Heavenly Father and His Son that we are not what we used to be. A senior brother or sister whose faith has been tested and tried through the experiences of life will often have a stronger, more mature faith as a result and serve as an exhortation to others.



The Apostle Paul reiterates an important principle applicable to believers of all ages: *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do* (Ephesians 2:8-10). God has prepared good works for us to do as a consequence of—not to merit or earn—our salvation. It is an expression of thankfulness for all that our Lord has done for us.

This remains true throughout our lives. Many elderly believers question how they might continue to contribute to the spiritual life of the ecclesia. The range of contributions is as diverse as the seniors themselves. One senior brother has led an ESL/Bible class with several interested Asian students, whereas another sister, confined to a wheelchair, annually makes the effort to attend Bible School serving to encourage others simply by her attendance. Others assist with Bible correspondence courses from their home, while yet others maintain a prayer list to minister to those in need of petition.

One of the most difficult problems that is endured in later life is chronic illness. This can lead to significant physical limitations and loss of independence. But even in

difficult circumstances—chronic, debilitating illness, loss or impending death, believers can develop an even closer relationship with our Heavenly Father and a stronger dependency upon His grace and mercy.

Having faith in God can help a senior focus on our brighter future. True faith is active; it involves belief, and living in the assurance of the coming Kingdom of God. In one survey, highly spiritual people—those who agreed “my religious faith is the most important influence in my life”—were twice as likely to say that they were “very happy”. Another study showed that elderly hospital patients who wondered whether God had abandoned them or questioned God’s love were significantly more likely to be dead two years later than those who held fast to their faith.

When we look back on our lives, the lure of this world loses its power and the losses of this life are seen in perspective. In fact the losses can become a means of spiritual gain. The Apostle Paul concluded, *“I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ”* (Phil. 3:8 NIV). Paul also acknowledged, *“We do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day*

by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 2 Cor. 4:16-17

But what if there is a preoccupation with the difficulties associated with aging? How are we to assist our elders if they become angry or bitter at their circumstances and fail to see things from God's perspective? This is an opportunity for caregivers and other brothers and sisters to demonstrate the love of Christ in practical terms.

- Be an empathetic listener and friend. Make time to listen to the senior relive past experiences and talk about losses. We are all exhorted to bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2).
- Offer hope and encouragement. Human contact—a loving hug and compassionate words can help to alleviate the pain of a grieving heart.
- Look for ways to offer practical help. If your elders are too frail to attend service, bring the service to them through phone or internet based ecclesial broadcasts. Some of these are accessible through dial up service with no need for a computer. Encourage them to do the daily readings or perhaps provide them with hymn CDs or other recordings. Recordings of different versions of the Bible are available on CD and this may be more preferable if vision is reduced.
- Remember that special dates remain important to seniors such as the anniversary of a spouse's death. When the effort is made to show interest in the lives of the aged, they take notice and feel valued.
- Promote new friendships and activities. If your ecclesia has widows or widowers, it is important to encourage them to forge new friendships with those with whom they can share concerns. Often a senior centre or participation in a volunteer opportunity can provide an avenue for new contact. As health and mobility permit, encourage your elder to reach out to others in some capacity. A phone call or letter can be within almost everyone's reach.
- If your elder has spiritual concerns, suggest a meeting together with another brother or sister to discuss troubling issues. This may also provide opportunity for prayer and for breaking bread.

- Remain positive in your outlook. Dealing with changing circumstances and getting over losses takes time. Be a patient and encouraging shoulder to lean on.

A senior who is able to view life with a positive outlook is better able to cope with major challenges compared to his pessimistic counterpart. Optimistic individuals feel more in control of their lives. This in turn promotes better health and well being.

If our seniors fret about their circumstances, or dwell on the disappointments and frustrations of growing old, try

**Offer hope and encouragement.
Human contact—a loving hug and compassionate words can help to alleviate the pain of a grieving heart.**

to refocus their minds on the great hope we have before us. We are exhorted, 'In everything give thanks' (1 Thess. 5:18). Remind them that they are loved and valued. Our Heavenly Father encourages us to "cast our cares upon Him because He cares for us" (1 Peter 5:7). 'God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble' (Psalm 46:1).

There are benefits to remaining active in ecclesial life. Sociologists have demonstrated that church attenders are not only more likely to avoid unhealthy habits and lifestyles, but they also have a stronger social network to call on for advice or help—a benefit for both caregivers and the elderly themselves. Frequent church attenders develop close ties with friends, neighbors, and relatives, and these have a positive impact on their health.

While many elderly people do attend services, for others, church attendance can become a negative experience. One reason is that many denominations have undergone dramatic changes in recent years, reexamining their doctrinal stances on a host of social issues. It may be argued that the Truth has remained largely impervious to the changing social mores of the world around us, but any change can be perceived as unwelcome seen through the eyes of those who link their beliefs to a particular form of institutional worship. Consequently, the introduction of contemporary music styles, more casual forms of dress, a lack of solemnity or perhaps the increasing role of sisters in ecclesial life can all contribute to what is seen as a very different meeting from years gone by.

For older persons there is a sense of security in the traditional ways and a feeling of loss when these ways are abandoned. The switch from traditional hymns to more contemporary songs with guitar accompaniment during Sunday School, for example, can make many older brethren uncomfortable. While some are able to adapt to changes or learn to tolerate them for the greater good, others may feel that the ecclesia has left them behind and their opinion and contribution is no longer valued. If these elders stop attend-

ing, they might in turn begin to feel guilty for “forsaking the assembling” of believers together (Hebrews 10:25 NKJV). The solution does not lie in pulling up stakes or seeking an ecclesia that is more traditional in its culture, but for each generation to seek to view the issue through the eyes of the other, and develop the fruits of the spirit and learn to live in brotherly accommodation. As Paul wrote to the brethren in Corinth, ‘Make love your aim’ (1 Cor. 14:1).

Seniors and the Ecclesia—A Mutually Beneficial Relationship

Ecclesias can benefit from the spiritual maturity, wisdom and humility of our more senior members. Older brothers and sisters play an important role in an ecclesia’s spiritual life. In Psa. 71:17-18, David declared, *“Since my youth, O God, you have taught me, and to this day I declare your marvelous deeds. Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, O God, till I declare your power to the next generation, your might to all who are to come.”*

There are ample opportunities for elderly ecclesial members to ‘declare God’s marvelous deeds’. A life in the Truth brings with it a wealth of experience and reliance upon the hand of God. Like the Psalmist, the aged too can declare the Almighty’s power to the next generation. When broth-

ers and sisters can share God’s working in their lives, it not only adds meaning and significance to their own lives of discipleship, but it can leave a spiritual legacy for others to follow. It can inspire us to demonstrate the same diligence in helping our brethren as we ‘imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.’ (Hebrews 6:12 NIV). The witness of elderly believers may be their most important legacy to children, grandchildren and the ecclesia.

Age need not be an impediment to service. Many senior brothers and sisters continue to contribute in various capacities—leading or supporting Bible classes, participat-



Brother Don Morgan and Brother Bob and Sister Jean Rapley supporting the Toronto North Study Day.

ing in the Sunday morning service, providing pastoral support with phone calls or letters, offering a word of wisdom or guidance that comes from living a life in the Truth.

A key contribution of elderly believers is personal prayer. Even if they are unable to attend meeting on a regular basis, prayer can remain a significant part of their spiritual lives. Involve them with specific prayer requests. We are all exhorted to pray for those over us (1 Tim. 2:1-4). Many in the ecclesia would appreciate prayer on their behalf. The Apostle Paul encouraged the first century believers to pray for him and his fellow workers. These prayers for others fulfill an important contribution to the spiritual life of the ecclesia.



Some elderly brothers and sisters are able to support the work of the brotherhood financially. As the Good News is spread around the globe, opportunities abound to share in the temporal blessings with which we have been blessed. Although most seniors are on fixed incomes, many expenses that were prominent earlier in life—child rearing, mortgage and car payments—are no longer an issue and disposable income is available to support the work of the ecclesia.

Just as a vibrant ecclesia benefits from the presence of older members, elderly brothers and sisters similarly need the fellowship, pastoral support and spiritual sustenance that the ecclesia can provide. Involvement in ecclesial life can help elderly brothers and sisters get their eyes off themselves and keep them focused on the vision of God's Kingdom.

What can your ecclesia do for its senior members?

1. Ministry to shut-ins. The ecclesia can provide a vital function in caring for people who are 'shut-in' and can't attend Sunday services. Some ecclesias organize a formal schedule to have members break bread with those who are house bound, while other ecclesias do this on a more informal basis. One older couple in southern Ontario took this on as a personal project, regularly borrowing the 'emblem case' to share the memorials with brethren, more elderly than themselves. Such faithful acts of compassion do not go unnoticed by our Father in heaven. Decreasing mental capacities also can make the service an overwhelming or negative experience for a senior. Research shows that people with dementia (such as Alzheimer's disease) may experience too much stimulation from attending religious services. Many people in this situation find it less stressful to watch the service over the internet or listen to recordings. Consider visiting such an elder on a Sunday morning with a laptop and emblems.

Sunday School students can also get involved by making 'Thinking of You' cards or other mementos for elderly ecclesial members. This not only makes the older members feel special, it also makes the Sunday School students aware of their presence. Young People's groups have hosted ecclesial Seniors' Dinners and invited the diners to

share with them significant and meaningful events in their life in the Truth. Opportunities abound for the younger generation to assist older brothers and sisters who remain in their homes with yard maintenance and household chores. Assistance in filing taxes, insurance or other paper work can relieve a burden of anxiety.

2. Telephone Assurance Networks. Many ecclesias have a Caring/Pastoral Care committee that can keep in regular contact with more senior members—to say hello, to keep them up to date on ecclesial activities, perhaps to ask about health concerns and to inquire how they're managing.

3. If poor eyesight or diminishing physical health keeps your elder from driving to meeting (a common problem for evening or midweek Bible class, when it is dark), offer to arrange transportation. Assistive listening devices can be installed at ecclesial halls to assist the hearing impaired. Such a unit consists of a base transmitter and several receivers with ear bud style headphones. These are available in Canada for approximately a thousand dollars. Large print versions of the 2002 Hymn Book can also be purchased to aid those with loss of vision.

One commentator noted that with increasing age and debility, many seniors become residents of assisted living residences or nursing homes where they are often

neglected by both family members and their previous church congregations because visiting is 'depressing' or the younger generation is too busy with their own lives. Let this not be said of us! Some brothers and sisters may be apprehensive about visiting a nursing home because they don't know what to do or say. Sharing the love of Christ may not show visible results or improvement. Often the elderly don't get better; eventually they die. Ministering to aged brothers and sisters is not glamorous work but serving them is service rendered to our Lord Jesus Christ (Matt 25:31-40).

Upcoming Seminar

Meeting Our Seniors' Needs

Saturday, April 5th, 2014

Toronto North Ecclesial Hall

39 Knox Avenue

North York Ontario

Please mark your calendars to join us for an informative seminar, cohosted by the Christadelphian Caring Network dealing with practical issues affecting senior brothers and sisters.

Further details will be forwarded to Recording Brethren/ Secretaries in Southern Ontario early in 2014.

Foundation's Terms of Reference

How can the Fairhaven Christadelphian Charitable Foundation be of assistance to your ecclesia? Are there health and welfare needs in your meeting that require attention, but ecclesial resources are strained or insufficient? The Foundation, operating under the applicable government regulations, may provide grants only to registered charities in Canada. We must disperse a percentage of our investment income each year, based upon a government regulatory formula.

Ecclesias in Canada may request assistance from the Foundation by following these guidelines: Only requests from Arranging Boards will be considered. Requests from an individual member of an ecclesia will not be accepted by the Foundation. Priority is to be given to the welfare needs of Christadelphian elderly, since this reflects the original purpose of Fairhaven House. If additional funds are available after meeting these needs, then more general health and welfare needs of the Christadelphian community will be considered, followed by health and welfare needs of the community at large. Requests must be in writing and should document, in confidence, the need, the background, the amount of help required and the amount of help being provided by the ecclesia. It is expected that the ecclesia requesting support will also provide funds to assist from its own resources. It is preferable, if possible, that ecclesias address emergency situations, and subsequently follow up with a request to the Foundation. The board of the Foundation considers requests at its semi-annual meetings in March and August each year. Emergency requests will also be addressed as quickly as possible.

Requests may be sent to:

The Fairhaven Christadelphian Foundation
 c/o Sister Penny Sheppard, Secretary
 39 Knox Avenue
 North York, ON, M9L 2M2

It is important to appreciate that the primary responsibility to meet the welfare needs of our brothers, sisters and young people lies at the ecclesial level, and consequently the Foundation's role is to supplement, rather than supplant this ecclesial responsibility. We encourage ecclesias to be actively aware of situations where there is a need, extend help, and then approach the Foundation as a funding partner.

Year End Financial Report

Statement of Revenue, Expenses and Fund Balance for the Year Ending March 31, 2013

Revenue

Investment income	12,516
Donations	3,950
	16,466

Expenses

Grants	5,050
Professional fees	4,013
Administrative	2,024
	11,087

Net Income	5,379
Opening fund balance	365,893
Closing fund balance	371,272

An Appeal

In this low interest rate environment, income generated from investments has often been inadequate to address the needs of recipient ecclesias and consequently, the Foundation's capital has continued to diminish.

The Foundation would welcome ecclesial and individual gifts to support this work of the Lord. Donations may be sent to the treasurer:

Bro. Jonathan Farrar
 140 Whitwell Way,
 Binbrook, ON, L0R 1C0

The Fairhaven Christadelphian Charitable Foundation
 c/o 39 Knox Avenue
 North York, ON, M9L 2M2

Visit us at www.fairhavenfoundation.ca

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